

Diabolus Byzantinus

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It may be true to say that the function of the Devil is to externalize evil, but it is equally true that man creates the Devil as a negative of his own image, an embodiment of his fears and even of his secret desires. Hence the subject of homo byzantinus, to which this volume is dedicated, subsumes that of Diabolus byzantinus.

It has been my experience that whenever the topic of demonology is raised in public it creates a certain amount of hilarity. We are convinced that demons do not exist and that medieval man was silly in believing in them, just as people today who think they have seen Martians or other little green men are being plain silly. Martians may be suitable for juvenile entertainment but are not worth the attention of serious historians; which is why, I presume, demonology, along with other "superstitions," has been swept under the rug. In a recent (and very perceptive) book on paganism and Christianity in the first three centuries, the Devil with his host receives only passing mention.¹ Yet it seems to me that demonology is central to the study of early Christianity and Byzantium.² I would even go so far as to say that demonology contributed very powerfully to the spread of the Christian religion.

To begin with a well-known example, no one, I believe, would argue that the Life of St. Anthony was intended to be understood as a romance. Even if its attribution to Athanasius is again in the balance,³ it is certainly a document of the third quar-

ter of the fourth century and had a perfectly serious purpose, namely, to provide an exemplar for other monks to follow and to demonstrate to pagans that their gods were in reality demons. I can find no indication that the Life of Anthony, which proved extremely popular from the start, was addressed to an ignorant audience, and there is certainly no hint that readers would have found it incredible.

As J. Daniélou has shown,⁴ the Life of Anthony embodies a remarkably coherent, almost "scientific," conception of the demonic realm, which is located in the air below the visible heaven. Demons are in the air as a result of their fall and they are constantly tossed by the turbulence of the winds, which stands in contrast to the serenity of the celestial sphere—hence the disorder and tumult that express demonic action. By virtue of their position in the air demons are able to block the upward progress of human souls after death, this being the familiar notion of the *telōnia*, destined to persist until the end of the Byzantine period. It is also implied that Christ's death on the cross, a death that was, so to speak, off the ground, was a direct challenge to the demons in their own habitat, hence the peculiar power of the cross against evil spirits.⁵ One may wonder whether the same consideration had some bearing at a later date on the introduction of stylitism.

¹R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London, 1986), 326 ff.

²Despite its title, the stimulating study by P. Brown, "Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity," in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. M. Douglas (London, 1970), 17–45, has little to say on the subject of demonology in the early Church. Sorcery is a separate issue. To take one example, the *Apology* of Apuleius, which concerns a charge of sorcery, does not introduce any demons on the scene, except an allusion to the *daemones* of Platonism. Had it been written in the 4th century it would have been crawling with demons.

³See esp. R. Draguet, *La Vie primitive de S. Antoine conservée en syriaque*, CSCO 418 (1980), 104* ff. For further bibliography on

this question, see J. -M. Sansterre, "Quelques aspects de la propagande monastique dans l'Antiquité tardive," in *Propagande et contre-propagande religieuses*, ed. J. Marx (Brussels, 1987), 66–67, notes 26–27. My chapter references are to the "vulgate" in PG 26, cols. 835 ff.

⁴J. Daniélou, "Les démons de l'air dans la Vie d'Antoine," *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (1956), 136–47. The article by N. H. Baynes, "St. Anthony and the Demons," *JEA* 40 (1954), 7–10, is of little help.

⁵PG 26, col. 893c. This notion is made explicit by Athanasius, *De incarnatione Verbi*, 25.5. Cf. Eusebius, *De demonstratione evangelica*, 10.8.73; Scholion on Ps. 67:19 (ἀνέβης εἰς ὕψος, ἡχμαλώτευσας αἰχμαλώτων), PG 12, cols. 1508–9. In the same

Whereas the Life of Anthony fails to convey any clear picture of its protagonist's character, it presents with many fine nuances a psychological portrait of the Devil and his demons, who are given center stage. Demons, we are informed, are bold, insolent, and persistent, but basically weak. They are also cunning and observant (στοχασταί). Being ignorant of the future, they nevertheless make predictions (which are occasionally true) relying on their swiftness of movement and their experience, somewhat in the same manner that a physician diagnoses a disease or a sea captain foresees the weather. That is how pagan oracles were established. Indeed, all of paganism is a demonic invention.

It may be thought that the Devil, as portrayed here, is not a very terrifying adversary, although he actually beats up Anthony (chap. 8) and the noise of the battle he wages with the saint is audible to visitors, who cower in fear (chap. 13). The Devil is, above all, a master of illusion (φαντασία)—a key word in this context. It was by means of φαντασάι that the demons deceived the pagans; they hide their impotence behind ὄχλοι and φαντασάι (chap. 28); they create φαντασάι when they assume the form of women, beasts, giants, soldiers (chap. 23), or, indeed, of monks. The English equivalent shades off from illusion to delusion to ostentation. Perfectly real himself, the Devil nevertheless operates on the level of unreality, bent on his ultimate goal, which is to block to Christians access to heaven.

To neutralize the threat posed by so shifty an enemy, to distinguish more dangerous demons from the less dangerous, one needs the gift of discernment (χάρισμα διακρίσεως πνευμάτων), which is the preserve of the monastic saint. Sometimes it is granted in youth, but more usually it is the result of prolonged *askēsis*. We can now see how ambitious a claim is made in the Life of Anthony: the holy monk, now that persecution by a pagan government is over, is man's chief champion in the struggle against the powers of darkness, a struggle that takes place on the frontier between reality and unreality.

Let us now move forward a hundred years and take a look at the Life of Hypatius by Callinicus. The author is here a Syrian, not an Egyptian; the setting not the desert but the suburbs of Constantinople; the hero not a peasant but a member of the provincial gentry; the role of the Devil just as important, but more varied as befits the circumstances of life in the "real" world. There are some

surprises: the immediate hinterland of the capital, on both the European and Asiatic side, is still substantially pagan (this in the first half of the 5th century) and sacrifices of animals are still offered in temples.⁶ The regular clergy is pretty ineffectual and does little to take the situation in hand. Even the bishop of Chalcedon sees no harm in a proposal to revive the Olympic games in the theater of his city until it is explained to him by a delegation of monks that the games in question were "a terrible festival of Satan" and amounted to pure idolatry (chap. 33.1). The task of converting the peasantry falls, therefore, to the monks.

At the boundary between the capital and the countryside the demons prefer to dwell in uninhabited places: on a wooded mountain in Thrace (chap. 2.1), in the deserted monastery of Rufiniana, whence the first installation of Egyptian monks had departed (chap. 8.6), by a river in Bithynia, where the demon Artemis, ten times as tall as a man, is seen tending pigs (chap. 45). Satan is quite a grand character, an emperor, no less, who sits under a canopy (κιβώριον) surrounded by his own court (παράστασις) of demons (chap. 28). Hypatius urges him to repent and offers him the possibility—an unusual, though not unparalleled touch—of being received by God as a penitent through the prayers of the saints, but Satan, who is pleased with the authority he enjoys in the world, naturally refuses (chap. 15).

Demons are often implanted in human beings as the result of magic,⁷ occasionally as a consequence of evil deeds,⁸ but it may be noted that the amount of pain the demon causes his host and his tenacity in resisting eviction do not appear to be related to the gravity of any offense that may have been committed. On one occasion a demon enters a person as the result of thunder (chap. 22.10). Demons make animals sick (chap. 22.21) or kill them (chap. 38.10). They produce what we would call psychic phenomena: a fiery ball shoots round an abandoned chapel (chap. 8.12); a girdle dedicated to Artemis does not burn in the fire, but turns into a

vein, *Transitus Mariae* B (Pseudo-Melito) in C. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae* (Leipzig, 1866), 129.

⁶*Vie d'Hypatios*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, SC 177 (Paris, 1971), chaps. 30.1–2, 43.11–13, 45.1–8.

⁷*Ibid.*, chaps. 15.1–2; 22.15, where ἦν δὲ ὁ δαίμων ἀπὸ περιεργείας δεινῆς (as a result of terrible magic) is mistranslated by the editor as "Ce démon possédait un charme très puissant"; 28.2, 14; 44.20 ff.

⁸Such as taking communion after committing adultery: chap. 28.11. Possession often returned if a patient, after being healed, took up a disorderly life: chaps. 28.53, 55; 40.8 ff.

spherical vessel (chap. 43). On the level of everyday life demons urge people to enjoy themselves, to eat and drink, wear fine clothes, marry and have children. All of those are the Devil's baits. And why is that? Because having married, a man desires money, and that leads to injustice, perjury, and preoccupation with worldly business, which prevents him from going to church (chap. 24.16 ff).

It would be easy to pile text upon text and example upon example, but that would not answer the obvious question: how, when, and whence has this myriad of demons irrupted into the Mediterranean world? "Are they invaders of Greece from Iran," asked Norman Baynes, "a legacy of the Persian world which Alexander had planned to take into partnership?—or were they always there in the Greek countryside, banished only from the city state where rationalism had rendered men immune from supernatural terrors—are they the Keres which in the earliest days of Greece filled land and sea—have they merely changed their name?"⁹ It does not fall to the Byzantinist to explain in detail how the irruption of the demons took place (that had happened before the beginning of his chosen period), but it is useful for him to bear in mind the following considerations.

1. Demons and the Devil play a minimal and by no means easily definable role in the Old Testament.

2. They do, on the other hand, figure prominently in the New Testament, which was evidently addressed to an audience that believed in the reality of demons, just as it is clear from Acts that the Jews of the diaspora did so, and had among them exorcists who were beginning to use in their incantations the name of Jesus in addition, no doubt, to other potent names. The demonology of the New Testament is, however, extremely vague. The Devil of the Temptation is neither a fallen angel nor an intermediary between God and man, but a *kosmokrator* possessing in his power all the kingdoms of the earth (Matt. 4:8–9; Luke 4:6–7). We are not offered, however, any explanation of his status or of his relation to "ordinary" demons, who cause sickness and derangement in humans and animals.¹⁰

3. Among classical authors an awareness of demonology appears on the fringes of their field of

vision by the second half of the second century A.D. Demonology was purveyed by sleazy Orientals (Jews, Syrians, Egyptians) and was not taken seriously by gentlemen. Marcus Aurelius lists it, next to the keeping of quail, as one of the silly interests he was taught to avoid.¹¹ Lucian, himself a Mesopotamian, makes fun of foreign exorcists while identifying certain features that are familiar to us from a Christian context: demons change their form into that of wild beasts; they are black when driven out.¹² Particularly interesting is the fact that demons do not appear¹³ in the Dreambook of Artemidorus, which details every conceivable kind of nocturnal vision, including dreams of gods and goddesses, who are meticulously classified as Olympian, heavenly, earthly, maritime, riverine, and chthonian. People even dreamt of having sex with gods and goddesses. No field of activity would have been more appropriate for demons than that of dreams if belief in them was widespread at the time. The so-called demonology of Plutarch has little to do with our topic.¹⁴

4. A systematic working-out of biblical data and their integration into a coherent system of demonology was accomplished by Christian thinkers from the second to the fourth centuries, notably Origen.¹⁵ This was achieved by a process of identification (Satan being equated with Lucifer, the Prince of Tyre, and the Dragon), elimination (of the mysterious Watchers who, in the book of Genesis, lusted after the daughters of men), and creative reflection. Origen's elaborate and subtle explanation needed some adjustment, but was, by and large, accepted by the Church.

5. The system of demonology adopted by the Church was specifically a response to the situation of the second to fourth centuries, and its chief plank was the identification of paganism, its cults and oracles, and, of course, its persecution of Christians with the realm of the demonic. That could not have happened unless by this time a considerable proportion of the public believed in the existence

⁹N. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 7. The answer, of course, is that Christian demons have nothing to do with Homer's *κῆρες*.

¹⁰See, e.g., H. A. Kelly, "The Devil in the Desert," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964), 190 ff. The same author's *The Devil*,

Demonology and Witchcraft (New York, 1968) is dedicated to demonstrating that demonology is peripheral to Christianity and was foisted upon it largely by Origen. I would not have drawn the same conclusion from the fact that demonology is not clearly defined in the New Testament.

¹¹Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.6.

¹²Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 30–31.

¹³Except for a casual reference at 2.39, Pack 175 to Ἐκάτη χθονία καὶ Ἑρηνύες καὶ δαίμονες οἱ περὶ τούτους.

¹⁴See G. Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque* (Paris, 1942).

¹⁵See, among others, J. B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), 123 ff.

of demons. One would not command credibility today by ascribing the failure of communism to Martians.

6. Indeed, by the fourth century just about everyone—Christian, Jew, Manichaean, and pagan—believed in the reality of demons. Even the intellectuals had surrendered. To quote Ramsay MacMullen: “By any test we can make, men born with Constantine were likely to hold ideas that their predecessors, at the death of Marcus Aurelius, would have rejected.”¹⁶ Setting aside the testimony of texts, the archaeological evidence is overwhelming: magical papyri (hardly any of them, it seems, earlier than the third century),¹⁷ magical gems and amulets that may have belonged to persons of any religious persuasion,¹⁸ inscriptions, *tabellae defixionum*. To quote one example out of thousands, a Christian lady of Beirut, named Alexandra, went to the trouble of inscribing a text of 120 lines on a silver lamella, which she may have worn in her lifetime and with which she was buried. In it she invoked the help of every conceivable angelic power and of Jesus Christ himself to protect her from all demons, magicians, and spells. She felt threatened at every turn, while eating and drinking, at home and abroad, in the bath, during social intercourse, and, paradoxically, even in prayer. Yet she sought help not from her church, but from a magician, who may well have been a Jew.¹⁹

As the Byzantine period opens, the flood of demonism on which the Church was carried to victory by claiming a superior magic is in full flow. The sick and the possessed throng into churches or seek the help of holy men, exorcisms are being continually performed, the patients scream, levitate, and are rent asunder until some foul animal—a frog, a snake, or a crow—issues from their mouth. This is happening publicly and is a matter of ordinary observation. To quote H.-I. Marrou: “Pour les hommes du IV^e siècle de notre ère, l’existence des Anges, Bons et Mauvais, relevait non seulement de la conviction la plus ferme et la plus explicite, mais, il faut aller jusque là, de l’expéri-

ence la plus concrète, la plus vécue, la plus quotidienne.”²⁰ Indeed, so concrete that it even entered legal textbooks: “If a man takes a wife and finds a devil in her and wishes to divorce her on account of the devil; if, upon enquiry, it appears that she acquired the devil after marriage, he shall owe her the entire dowry she brought with her and all the donation he assigned to her.”²¹ Whether we choose to explain such phenomena as cases of hysteria or identify them with other medical conditions, notably epilepsy, does not materially change the picture. The important datum is that a wide range of disease was regarded as being due to demonic action and that in response to this belief there mushroomed a deterrent mechanism of holy men, holy sites, miraculous icons (certainly by the sixth century), and superstitious remedies—nothing short of an industry that caused people to travel over great distances, make offerings they could ill afford, and contribute to the prosperity of this or that center of supernatural potency.

One would hardly guess when reading texts of the fourth and later centuries that demonic forces were supposedly in retreat. They had to be in retreat because that great diabolical machine, the pagan state with all its institutions, had been dismantled. Yet its destruction left behind a disquieting landscape. The rapid rate of conversion had not allowed sufficient time for the countryside to be sanitized. From the fourth century to the seventh (and beyond) the work of the saints was to mop up the demons who, though defeated, were clinging tenaciously to their old haunts. That is the situation so graphically portrayed on the eve of the Persian invasion of Asia Minor in the Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon. To counteract the demonic presence a network of shrines had to be set up. The archangels—the traditional foes of the demons—were particularly useful in this respect, but so were also the relics of saints, which radiated their powers like dispersed beacons shining in the dark.

That, I believe, is the broad landscape against which the development of Byzantine demonology should be viewed. Its course has not yet been charted in detail. The very thorough article “Démon” by J. Daniélou and others in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*²² does not extend in the realm of eastern Christendom beyond the ascetic writers of the

¹⁶R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (Beckenham, Kent, 1969), 7.

¹⁷See, e.g., A. D. Nock, “Greek Magical Papyri,” *JEA* 15 (1929), 219–35 = *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, I (Oxford, 1986), 176–94.

¹⁸Cf. Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor, 1950), 18: “In the great majority of examples we cannot definitely prove that the wearer of the amulet was a follower of the religion that might be indicated by his pendant or ring.”

¹⁹A. Héron de Villefosse, “Tablette magique de Beyrouth,” in *Florilegium M. de Vogüé* (Paris, 1909), 287 ff.

²⁰“Un ange déchu, un ange pourtant,” in *Satan: Etudes carmé-litaines* (Paris, 1948), 32.

²¹Syriac lawbook in S. Riccobono et al., *Fontes iuris romani antejustiniani*, II (Florence, 1940), 793, chap. 114.

²²J. Daniélou et al. in *DSp* 3 (1957), 141 ff.

fifth century. A. Delatte and Ch. Jusserand have commented on some late Byzantine manuals of magic.²³ P. Ioannou has collected and classified a wide range of *diableries*, culled mostly from hagiographic texts.²⁴ In a recent multivolume study of the Devil by J. B. Russell, Byzantium rates only one chapter, in which Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus Confessor, St. John Damascene, and Michael Psellus make a brief appearance and reference is made to dualist heresies and popular demonology.²⁵ Premature as it may be, therefore, to draw any general conclusions from a body of material that has been so imperfectly explored, I would still venture to isolate a few features that appear to me significant.

1. As before, demons remain entrenched in the countryside much more than they are in cities. That implies a measure of dissociation between demons and sin, for it is a cliché of early Christian and Byzantine thought, at least down to the seventh century, that the city, with its hippodrome, theaters, brothels, and taverns, with its mimes, musicians, and prostitutes, was the locus par excellence of sin, temptation, and *perispasmos*. The most familiar statement of the case is Tertullian's *De spectaculis*. Several centuries later St. John Damascene in his ethical encyclopedia has only one entry on the word *polis*, and that is entitled "Concerning the city filled with iniquity."²⁶ The biblical and patristic quotations he assembles bring out the immorality and vanity of urban life to the exclusion of any positive feature. The demon of the hippodrome still stalked Constantinople in the tenth century.²⁷ That being so, one would expect the greatest concentration of demons in the city ("in qua daemoniorum conventus consedit," to quote Tertullian's words) rather than in the countryside; yet exactly the opposite is the case.

²³ A. Delatte and Ch. Jusserand, "Contribution à l'étude de la démonologie byzantine," in *Mélanges Bidez*, I (Brussels, 1934), 207–32.

²⁴ P. Ioannou, "Les croyances démonologiques au XI^e siècle à Byzance," *Actes du VI^e Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines*, Paris, 1948, I (Paris, 1950), 245–60; idem, *Démonologie populaire, démonologie critique au XI^e siècle* (Wiesbaden, 1971). The article by A. Ducellier, "Le Diable à Byzance," in *Le Diable au moyen-âge*, Senefiance No. 6 (Aix-en-Provence, 1979), 197–212, does not add much to the subject.

²⁵ J. B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), 28 ff. I regret not having had before me the well-documented thesis by R. P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam, 1988), which, however, has the disadvantage from my point of view of concentrating on a period that added little to the stock of long-accepted beliefs and practices.

²⁶ John Damascene, *Sacra parallela*, PG 96, cols. 308–12.

²⁷ *Life of St. Basil the Younger*, ed. A. N. Veselovskij, *Sbornik Ot-delenija russkago jazyka i slovesnosti* 53 (1891), supp., 7.

This point is already brought out in the *Life of Anthony*, in which the Devil complains pathetically that he had been driven out of cities by the spread of Christianity and so withdrew to the wilderness only to be faced with a growing number of monks.²⁸ "Go away from our territory! What business do you have in the desert?" cry the demons to Anthony.²⁹ That strikes me as a rationalization. The demons were predominantly in the countryside not because they had migrated there under duress, but because they had always been there, because they dwelt by squatters' right where man did not. "Don't you know," they exclaimed to St. Nikon Metanoieite in some unspecified part of Asia Minor, "that we are masters of this place by virtue of time [i.e., length of occupancy] if for no other reason?"³⁰ The places infested with demons are exhaustively listed in the *Euchologion* (the sea, rivers, wells, cliffs, ponds, marshes, forests, trees, pagan tombs), and it is the exorcist's task to drive them (for they cannot be destroyed) even farther away "to the wild mountains, to inaccessible, waterless, and unproductive places."³¹

2. We have already observed in the *Life of Hypatius* the random nature of demonic possession. Here are a few other examples. Theodoret tells a story about a young peasant of the Amanus mountain range, who happened to stop at a spring of water and drank of it. No sooner had he done so than a demon entered him. The unfortunate man was taken to St. Peter the Galatian, who spent a whole day in driving the demon out. The story was told by the patient's grandmother, who happened to be Theodoret's nurse, and so is well attested.³² In the following century another Syrian peasant was tilling a field and chanced on an ancient tomb. Thinking it contained treasure he opened it and had a vision of women embracing him: he collapsed, possessed by a demon. Not only was he greatly tortured, but the demon, out of jealousy, also prevented him from sleeping with his wife. Deserted by the woman, he sought the help of St. Symeon the Younger, who transferred the demon from the husband to his inhumane wife and finally

²⁸ PG 26, cols. 904A–B.

²⁹ Ibid., 861c.

³⁰ *Life of St. Nikon*, ed. S. Lambros, *Néos 'Ell.* 3 (1906), 148–49.

³¹ *Euchologion*, ed. J. Goar (Paris, 1647), 730–31, 736, 698. Cf. *La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, ed. P. van den Ven, I, SubsHag 32 (1962), chap. 229, where the vanquished demon exclaims, ἐπέκεινα πορεύσομαι ἐν τοῖς βαρβαρικοῖς, ἐν γῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἀβάτῳ καὶ ἀνύδρῳ ἀπελεύσομαι.

³² Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, 9.10, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, I, SC 234 (1977), 424–26.

healed her, too.³³ Several cases of random possession may be found in the Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon.³⁴ Finally, an example from tenth-century Greece. A woman of Euripus, needing water in a hurry, sends her daughter to the well. The girl, being simple-minded, hastens to the nearest well, which happens to be dirty and inhabited by evil spirits. As she lowers her bucket in the water a demon rises up in the form of a crow and takes possession of her. She falls to the ground, convulsed and foaming at the mouth. St. Nikon, who happens to be nearby, is fetched. At first he declines to intervene because of his modesty (i.e., to avoid φιλότιμον, the seeking after glory), but then consents to do so. He prays, binds the girl with a chain and, accompanied by a big crowd, leads her back to the well. He rebukes the unclean spirit, who departs from the girl, again in the form of a crow, and sinks into the well before everyone's eyes. At the saint's command the well is filled to ground level.³⁵

These cases, which are not confined to any one period or geographical area, are entirely typical and show the dissociation of demonic possession from any moral misdemeanor. The Syrian peasant may have been unwise to open an ancient tomb, just as the girl of Euripus may have been misguided in using a well that was impure, but neither of them had committed any sin. Occasionally possession did occur as a result of a serious transgression, such as sacrilege or adultery, or was deliberately inflicted by a saint on a sinner (as in the case of the Syrian peasant's wife), but more often than not it affected innocent people, who were either victims of magic, or simply happened to be out of doors at noon or after dark, who entered a cave, crossed a bridge, drank from a fountain, cut down a tree, or approached a pagan monument. As the Life of St. Auxentius puts it explicitly with regard to the possessed daughter of a curial of Claudopolis, "She suffered this fate not because of her sins, but because of the Adversary's extreme hatred of mankind."³⁶ The demons, who were omnipresent and malevolent, were lying in wait, ready to pounce on humans and farm animals, in whose warm bodies they then lived like germs or parasites. When not so employed they were content to hibernate for long periods of time, but attacked if

they were disturbed.³⁷ They were averse to being taken far from their natural habitat.³⁸

3. Whereas ordinary demons appear as perfectly real, it is my impression that the figure of Satan lacks consistency for the reason that he was a theological construct that did not correspond to any entity that had been familiar to Mediterranean peoples. True, the hierarchy of demons admitted of a plausible explanation. The lower kind, who preyed on common people, could be said to be limited by their nature to relatively crude forms of aggression. Above them in the hierarchical and ontological scale stood demons who were able to tempt men through the faculty of imagination.³⁹ These, I suppose, were the specialized demons of anger, avarice, vainglory, acedia, fornication, and other sins, who figure so prominently in monastic stories; even the demon of yawning (χασμωδία), who makes a solitary appearance in the Life of St. Andrew the Fool.⁴⁰ And further up the ladder stood Satan with his *comitatus*. The upper echelons, including Satan himself, duly turn up in literature, but usually without evoking a sense of actual experience. Sometimes they are introduced to serve the ends of political propaganda or satire, as when Patriarch Photius (archenemy of the Church that he was) sells his soul to Satan through the agency of a Jewish magician and acquires the services of a senior devil, a δυνάτης τοῦ Βελίαρ, called by the ludicrous name of Lebouphas, whose mission is to be "the helper of magicians, the leader of adulterers and brigands, and the friend of pagans (φίλος ἐλλήνων)."⁴¹ This, it seems to me, was not meant to be taken too seriously. In other instances we are transported to a realm of pure fantasy as in the Life of Leo of Catania, which is not so much the biography of a saint as the *roman* of a powerful magician called Heliodorus. Once again, through the mediation of a Jew, Heliodorus is instructed to stand at night upon a pagan tomb. The Devil, who is the lord of the air, appears to him riding on a stag (a form of locomotion I do not recall meeting

³³ *Vie ancienne*, chap. 229.

³⁴ *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, ed. A.-J. Festugière, I, SubsHag 48 (1970), chaps. 43, 44, 114, 115, 116, 161 (mass possession caused by excavation), 91 (man attacked by demon while sleeping by roadside).

³⁵ *Life of St. Nikon*, 157–58.

³⁶ PG 114, cols. 1393c–d.

³⁷ As when a craftsman at Amaseia was cutting out an old mosaic representing Aphrodite in which a demon dwelt; *Vita Eutychii*, chap. 53, PG 86, cols. 2333–36. The story is interesting also from another point of view. It shows that as late as the reign of Justin II a Christian was content to have a picture of "the unclean Aphrodite" in his house and removed it only when he decided to convert the house into a chapel.

³⁸ E.g., *Vita Abercii*, ed. Th. Nissen (Leipzig, 1912), 44.

³⁹ Psellus, *De operatione daemonum*, ed. P. Gautier, *REB* 38 (1980), 153 ff.

⁴⁰ PG 111, col. 732c.

⁴¹ Pseudo-Symeon, Bonn ed., along with Theophanes Cont., 669–73.

elsewhere) and gives him, as to Photius, one of his notables, called Gaspar, to be his companion (συμπάρεδρος). Thus recruited by the Enemy, what does Heliodorus do? He subverts the marketplace by substituting worthless bits of wood and stone for gold coins, so that everyone gives up trading and becomes poor. He causes women walking in the street to imagine streams in front of them so as to make them raise their tunics to their thighs. He inspires the daughters of noblemen with ungovernable passions.⁴² These may appear to us rather trivial acts for such a powerful evil-doer, but they offer an interesting reverse confirmation of the supreme value that the Byzantines placed on *eutaxia*.

Rather exceptional by reason of its vividness is the Devil's intervention in the Acta of St. Anastasius the Persian.⁴³ The story takes place in Rome in the year 713 and is told, presumably, by an eyewitness with a wealth of concrete detail. The victim is the nubile daughter of a rich Syrian bishop, recently arrived in the West, and the cause of possession is magic. A suitor of the young woman engages the services of a Sicilian sorcerer, who binds the Devil (it is, indeed, Satan himself) in a fig leaf and throws it down in the street. The young woman steps on it as she is going to the bath and becomes possessed. Asked to explain how he could have been imprisoned in a fig leaf when he was such an important personage, the Devil explains that he had taken an oath on his crown and was unable to break it in deference to his own dignitaries and the regiments that surrounded him. The only way to expel him was by undoing the κατάδεσμοι, that is, by recourse to magical means, which the pious bishop, of course, refuses to do. The Devil, in other words, does have a code of honor with respect to his own subordinates.

The exorcism takes a long time. First, a tooth of St. Anastasius (his head was kept in Rome) is hung round the girl's neck, but the Devil causes it to fall off. Even the whole head proves ineffectual because St. Anastasius had gone off to the East and was not about to return for another month. Only when he comes back is the healing effected. The Devil acknowledges his defeat and leaves the body after a persistent struggle.

In the course of this long account the Devil, who speaks through the mouth of his victim, is at first boastful and abusive: he acts according to his own

rules and will never submit to the Nazarene. Besides, the earth and the air belong to him. He brags about his accomplishments, which include the elevation to the throne of his special friend Philippicus. Gradually, however, he becomes more reasonable and even apologetic. We are left wondering, despite the explanation he offers, why he, the king of demons, had sworn to enter the body of a Syrian girl of no great consequence. Had the Sicilian sorcerer duped him into doing so?

4. The Byzantine Devil is a distinctly seedy character and remains so in the Orthodox tradition. Even in Dostoevski he is an undignified *prizival'schik* (parasite) who wears slightly shabby, unfashionable clothes and makes feeble jokes, not so frightening as he is pitiable. Far from being a prince of darkness, a proud and terrifying enemy, he appears as a devious "operator" who is put to flight by the sign of the cross or the recitation of a psalm. In art, too, he fails to frighten us. Both the Devil and minor demons are regularly pictured as shrunken angels, winged, dark in color, often with hair standing on end, occasionally with a short tail. This iconography, which is theologically correct and defines the demonic in terms of deprivation or incompleteness (i.e., lack of stature and light), persists to the very end of the Byzantine period.⁴⁴ What is noteworthy is that the Byzantine Devil or demon never acquires the frightening, hybrid forms he does in the West—the horns, bats' wings, animal head, cloven hooves. Only on the fringes, where Byzantine art comes under western influence and, generally, rather late in time do we find any of those monstrous traits. As for the figure of the gigantic, dusky old man, who is pictured in the Anastasis, he appears to personify Hades rather than Satan.⁴⁵ Yet there existed a textual basis for representing the Devil in a more frightening form. In the *Passio Bartholomaei*, for instance, he is described as having a pointed head like a dog's, a sparse beard, hair down to his feet, fiery eyes, and spiky wings like a porcupine (sic).⁴⁶

Granted that the Byzantines could not transcend their mentality, the question remains whether the comprehensive system of demonology they inherited underwent any significant change; for that system, as we have said, had been fashioned be-

⁴² Ed. B. Latyšev, *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des Sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, 8e sér., 12.2 (1914), 12 ff.

⁴³ *Acta M. Anastasii Persae*, ed. H. Usener (Bonn, 1894), 14 ff.

⁴⁴ We need a better study of this topic than that of Th. M. Provatakis, 'Ο Διάβολος εἰς τὴν βυζαντινὴν τέχνην (Thessaloniki, 1980).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Ps. -John Damascene, *Adversus Constantinum Cabalimum*, PG 95, col. 316A.

⁴⁶ *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, ed. Lipsius and Bonnet, II.1 (Leipzig, 1898), 146.

tween the second and fourth centuries as a response to paganism. The old paganism, however, faded away; its gods and wise men lived on, if at all, only as unwilling witnesses to Christ's Incarnation in the numerous "theosophies" that continued to circulate for a long time. Apollo, in particular, and Hermes Trismegistus had prophesied the Christian dispensation with much greater accuracy than the Hebrew prophets had done. There was a latent problem here that does not appear to have been faced: for if Apollo was a demon incapable of genuine foreknowledge, how did he come to be informed a long time in advance of Mary and the Virgin Birth? Is this simply an unwitting inconsistency or can we detect an attempt to include "the Greeks and barbarians" within the sphere of divine revelation, thus denying the exclusive role of the Hebrews?⁴⁷

The death of old paganism left, in any case, a gap in the demonic realm that might have been filled with new entrants, such as the pagan Slavs now settled on imperial territory, Muslims and various heretics, in particular Paulicians and Bogomils, who reinterpreted the biblical data on the Devil in a manner that did not lack all semblance of credibility. The response to these new challenges is difficult to evaluate. We find in the Life of St. Andrew the Fool a demon assuming the form of an Arab merchant.⁴⁸ Slav divinities (or so it would seem), worshiped by local herdsmen round Monemvasia, are the demons who announce to the Byzantine admiral Adrian the fall of Syracuse in 878.⁴⁹ Two Cappadocian bishops are accused of Bogomilism in 1143 for digging up Christian

graves in the belief that demons inhabited the corpses of sinners.⁵⁰ One may suspect a much greater variety of demonic manifestations in the Byzantine countryside than appears in our sources. Yet the only piece of original Byzantine speculation on this topic that has been adduced is the *De operatione daemonum*, attributed, rightly or wrongly, to Michael Psellus.⁵¹ Dating as it does from the period of the Bogomil crisis, it is marked—or so it seems to me—by a strange dissociation from the realities of its time.⁵² Indeed, it is an attempt to integrate traditional demonology into a Neoplatonic framework borrowed from Proclus. In a perceptive study of this text,⁵³ J. Grosdidier de Matons called it "un compromis boiteux et partiellement informulé." Even if one were to give slightly higher marks to the author, one may well wonder whether integrating demonology into Neoplatonism was the most urgent task that needed to be accomplished in that respect in the eleventh or twelfth century.

It is my impression, which I would not care to justify statistically, that Byzantine hagiography from the ninth century onward gives a relatively reduced role to demons. Of course, they turn up with some regularity, but often, if I may express a subjective feeling, because they are required by the laws of the genre rather than as the description of an actual experience. It is surprising, for example, how small a part demons play in the Life of St. Luke, a biography that is set in the context of a devastated countryside, repeatedly overrun by Arabs, Bulgarians, and Magyars—an ideal setting for demonic activity. Is this because the fury of the demons has abated or because the high-brow biographer has not stooped to portray the "realities" of his subject, contenting himself instead with a couple of routine temptations? The line between experience and invention is not an easy one to draw, not only for the tenth century but equally for the twentieth. In the obituary of an Athonite monk, a certain Father Eulogios, who died in 1948, I read the following incidents.⁵⁴ One day, when he was serving at table, he saw two demons sitting on the unwashed dishes, sarcastically licking fish bones, and that because the consumption of fish

⁴⁷The "theosophies" have been studied largely by classical scholars in search of oracular and other texts, but little attention has been paid to their intended message at the time they were composed, except by P. Batiffol, "Oracula hellenica," *RBibl*, n.s. 13 (1916), 177–99. Are they to be viewed simply as anti-pagan tracts or were they meant to show the consensus of all religious traditions, as was apparently the case with the lost work summarized by Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 170, whose author lived after the reign of Heraclius? One of the Syriac compilations, published by S. Brock, "A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers," *OLP* 14 (1983), 203–46, was explicitly intended to convert the pagans of Harran (at the end of the 6th century?), but even here the author was aware of the difficulty of having demons testify to the truths of Christianity and represented them as having done so under duress (p. 232). In the Tübingen Theosophy (last quarter of the 5th century), Apollo and other gods "intrude themselves among the angels" (τοῖς ἀγγέλοις παρενέχοντες ἑαυτοὺς): H. Erbse, *Fragmente griechischer Theosophien* (Hamburg, 1941), 175. That recalls the formulation of Lactantius, *De divinis institutionibus*, 1.7.9 (of Apollo), "cum sit e numero daemonum, angelis se adgregavit."

⁴⁸PG 111, cols. 681b–c (where Ἰσραηλῖτου ἐμπόρου should be corrected to Ἰσραηλῖτου), 688b.

⁴⁹Theophanes Cont., Bonn ed., 310–11.

⁵⁰Mansi, XXI, 588e.

⁵¹The traditional attribution is challenged by P. Gautier, "Le *De daemonibus* du pseudo-Psellos," *REB* 38 (1980), 105 ff.

⁵²As I have tried to show in *Byzantium and Its Image* (London, 1984), Study II, 10 ff.

⁵³J. Grosdidier de Matons, "Psellos et le monde de l'irrationnel," *TM* 6 (1976), 325 ff.

⁵⁴Πρωτότυπον, 2/8 (Jan.–Feb. 1984), 12–13.

was forbidden by the superior. Eulogios “bound” the demons and called in the terrified brethren to behold the sight, then released the demons after reproving them. The same Eulogios, in November

1941, while his disciples were out gathering olives, was beaten up so severely by demons that he nearly died. One is glad to see that Byzantium is still alive on the Holy Mountain.

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